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CLARISSA AND HER DOUBLES:

An Analysis of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and
Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*

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RESUMEN

En 1925 Virginia Woolf publicaba la novela *La señora Dalloway*, que más tarde sería conocida como una de las obras maestras del Modernismo inglés. Ambientada en el Londres de 1923, la historia narra un día en la vida de Clarissa Dalloway, una mujer que pertenece a la clase alta londinense, y Septimus Warren Smith, un veterano de guerra que lucha contra las secuelas que la contienda le dejó. Más de medio siglo después, en 1998, el escritor norteamericano Michael Cunningham reviviría la aclamada obra en su novela *Las horas* que, a pesar de tener lugar en el Nueva York de los noventa, narra un día en la vida de Clarissa Vaughan y su amigo Richard Brown, quien está enfermo de sida. Así pues, este Trabajo de Fin de Grado se centra en la figura del doble o álter ego no sólo entre el principal personaje femenino y masculino de cada novela sino también en el conjunto de ambas, ya que sin duda *Las horas* es una versión actualizada de la novela de Virginia Woolf.

ABSTRACT

In 1925, Virginia Woolf published her novel *Mrs Dalloway*, which would be later known as one of the masterpieces of English Modernism. Set in London in 1923, the story recounts one day in the life of Clarissa Dalloway, a woman who belongs to London's upper-class, and Septimus Warren Smith, a veteran who struggles with the trauma that the war left on him. More than half a century later, the American writer Michael Cunningham brought the acclaimed work back to life in his novel *The Hours*, which, despite taking place in the 1990s New York City, narrates one day in the life of Clarissa Vaughan and her friend Richard Brown, who suffers from AIDS. Thus, this Undergraduate Dissertation focuses on the figure of the double or alter ego not only between the main female and male character of each novel, but also in both as a whole as *The Hours* is undoubtedly an updated version of Virginia Woolf's novel.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Mrs Dalloway is one of the masterpieces of the Modernist period in English literature. *The Hours* brought back to life this classical novel and the figure of Virginia Woolf, adding a more contemporary view to the story. On the one hand, *Mrs Dalloway*, written by the British writer Virginia Woolf, was published in 1925. The novel describes a day in the life of Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith. She is an upper-class woman who lives in Westminster, London. He is a WWI veteran who suffers from shell shock. They do not know each other but at the end of the day, their lives are going to be connected. On the other hand, *The Hours*, written by the American writer Michael Cunningham, was published in 1998. It tells the story of three women: Virginia Woolf, Laura Brown and Clarissa Vaughan. Although they live in different periods of time, their lives are interconnected by the novel *Mrs Dalloway*. It must be highlighted that Cunningham did not choose the novel's title by chance. At first, as stated in Virginia Woolf's diaries, her novel was going to be titled *The Hours*, but in the end she decided to call it *Mrs Dalloway* (Bradshaw 43). This emphasises even more the strong connection between the two novels.

The aim of this dissertation is the analysis of the figure of the *alter ego* or *double* in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *The Hours* (1998), focusing on the main female and male character in each novel. According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, the term *alter ego* comes from the Latin *alter*, meaning “the other” (‘alter’), and *ego*, “I” (‘ego’), and was coined by Cicero, the Roman philosopher, to refer to “a second self, a trusted friend” (‘alter ego n.'). As the *Cambridge Dictionary* defines the term, it is “the part of someone's personality that is not usually seen by other people” (‘Alter Ego’ Def.1). In both novels, it can be said that Septimus Warren Smith and Richard Brown, a friend of Clarissa Vaughan, are the doubles or alter egos of Clarissa Dalloway and Clarissa

Vaughan, respectively. Moreover, Michael Cunningham's *Clarissa* is without a doubt a double of Woolf's one as happens with the male characters.

First of all, in order to contextualize this dissertation, I will introduce Virginia Woolf and *Mrs Dalloway* as well as Michael Cunningham and *The Hours*. The analysis is going to be divided into three sections. Firstly, I will focus on *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), giving a brief description of Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith, and discussing the concept of one being the other's double. Secondly, I will do the same with *The Hours* (1998). Finally, I will compare both novels, taking into account their historical context, in order to find similarities among their main characters.

1.1. Virginia Woolf and *Mrs Dalloway* (1925)

Virginia Woolf was born Adeline Virginia Stephen in London in 1882, becoming one of the main figures of Modernism in England on account of her experimental writing style. Although she is mainly known for her novels, Virginia also wrote some important essays, dealing with controversial issues at that time such as the figure of women throughout history, as she discussed in her essay *A Room of One's Own*. During her childhood, Virginia had access to the library of her father, Leslie Stephen, giving her the education she deserved and was denied for being a woman. Her lifetime was marked by her mental illnesses. In 1895, her mother died, and Virginia suffered her first breakdown. After her father's death, in 1904, she had a relapse, causing her to listen to the birds singing in Greek. She moved to the Bloomsbury district of London with her brothers and sister, Vanessa, who was essential in Virginia's life. There, she met some of the intellectuals of the moment, including her husband Leonard Woolf, and they became known as the Bloomsbury Group. In 1913, after episodes of depression and anorexia, she had a suicide attempt. The couple founded a publishing house, called the Hogarth Press, in 1917, as a

therapy for Virginia's illness. Despite her marriage, she had a very close friendship with Vita Sackville-West, to whom Virginia paid tribute in *Orlando*. As a consequence of the deterioration of her mental health, on 28th March 1941, Virginia drowned herself in the River Ouse, leaving two suicide notes addressed to Leonard and Vanessa, where she expressed her fear of not being able to go "through another of those terrible times" (Kermode 7-9).

Mrs Dalloway was published in 1925 at the Hogarth Press, owned by the Woolfs. It is an experimental novel following the concept of 'stream of consciousness', coined by William James in *The Principles of Psychology*, which focuses on "the flow of myriad impressions [...] that impinge on the consciousness of an individual and form part of his awareness along with the trend of his rational thoughts" ("Stream of Consciousness"). David Bradshaw, in his introduction to the Oxford World's Classics edition of *Mrs Dalloway*, comments on the importance of free indirect discourse in the novel, "a technique which allowed Woolf to fuse a number of discrete narrative perspectives and so draw together an assembly of characters on a single day" (41-42). Hence, Virginia Woolf wrote the novel following her invitation to "look within" in her essay "Modern Fiction", published in 1919 and revised in 1925. For her, it is important to look at the characters from a psychological or inside perspective rather than an outside one.

The novel is set in London on 13th June 1923, "life; London; this moment of June" (Woolf 4). Historically, the action takes place in the inter-war period (1918-1939), and the consequences of the Great War (1914-1918) are reflected in the text. The plot focuses on Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith. Although they never meet, their day runs parallel. Clarissa is married to Richard Dalloway, an MP, and has a daughter, Elizabeth, who is very different from her and loves spending time with her tutor Miss Kilman. As part of the social season, she is giving a party and has to arrange everything

for the night. An unexpected visit of her friend Peter Walsh makes Clarissa remember her youth and the time spent at Bourton with Sally Seton and him. Septimus, a WWI veteran who suffers from shell shock, has hallucinations with his dead friend Evans. His wife Lucrezia, in an attempt to help her husband, takes him to Dr Bradshaw, a psychiatrist. At the party, Clarissa is told that Septimus has committed suicide.

Even though mental health is the main issue in the novel, ideas about the passing of time, the barriers within the social classes or bisexuality also can be found. Thus, it is clear to admit the fact that Virginia Woolf expressed her own experiences, feelings and fears through the main characters of *Mrs Dalloway*. It is important to point out that, as stated in Woolf's introduction to the Modern Library Edition of *Mrs Dalloway* (1928), "Mrs. Dalloway was originally to kill herself, or perhaps merely to die at the end of the party" (Woolf qtd. in Page 115) but then, she decided Septimus "to be [Clarissa's] double" (Woolf qtd. in Bradshaw 21). Moreover, "*Mrs Dalloway* was written at a time when Woolf herself was both ill and misdiagnosed" (Bradshaw 19), being the main reason why she wanted *Mrs Dalloway* to be "a study of insanity and suicide: the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side" (Woolf qtd. in Bradshaw 19, from *Diary*, ii. 207), representing the figure of the 'sane' in Clarissa and the 'insane' in Septimus.

1.2. Michael Cunningham and *The Hours* (1998)

Michael Cunningham was born in 1952, in Cincinnati, Ohio. During his childhood, he lived in Chicago and Germany, to finally settle in Pasadena, California. Cunningham attended Stanford University, earning a BA in English literature, and the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop afterwards. He has taught Creative Writing at Columbia University, Brooklyn College and Yale. Cunningham wrote some novels and short stories, but it was not until the publication of *The Hours* that his reputation increased,

winning the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction in 1999. Among other awards, there can be found a Guggenheim Fellowship (1993) and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship (1998) (Young 12-14).

The Hours was published in 1998 and reached a warm reception by the public. As Tory Young comments, “Michael Cunningham has described *The Hours* (1998) as a ‘riff’ on Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (1925)” (33). He did not only rewrite *Mrs Dalloway*, but also brought the story into the 1990s, dealing with current issues such as AIDS or homosexuality. Furthermore, he “inserted Woolf, as author and character within it” (33). The plot focuses on “a warm June day in the lives of three ‘ordinary’ women” (Young 33), all of them interconnected by a common element, *Mrs Dalloway*. In 1923, Virginia Woolf is writing her well-known novel while facing her mental illness. In 1949, Laura Brown, a pregnant housewife who lives in Los Angeles and feels trapped into the American role model family, is reading *Mrs Dalloway* and plans to leave her husband and son. Clarissa Vaughan lives in the 1990s New York with her girlfriend Sally and her teenage daughter Julia. She is going to give a party for her friend Richard, a poet who suffers from AIDS, “in honor of the Carrouthers Prize” (Cunningham 16). He likes calling her ‘Mrs Dalloway’ and, as the reader discovers at the end of the novel, is Laura Brown’s son. Before the party, Clarissa is at Richard’s flat when he says to her “I don’t think two people could have been happier than we’ve been” (200). Suddenly, he throws himself out of a window, committing suicide, like Septimus in *Mrs Dalloway*. At the end of the day, Clarissa Vaughan and Laura Brown meet, sharing their feelings about Richard.

2. *MRS DALLOWAY* (1925)

2.1. Clarissa Dalloway: “The perfect hostess”

Clarissa Dalloway “had just broken into her fifty-second year” (Woolf 31). She lives in Westminster with her husband Richard Dalloway, who is a Member of Parliament, and her daughter Elizabeth. Although it is 1923 and English society has changed, the Dalloways represent ‘the perfect Victorian marriage’, in which men and women meant to belong in ‘separate spheres’ (Hughes). For Mrs Dalloway, “a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her, and she him” (Woolf 6-7). Therefore, Richard deals with his affairs as an MP whereas Clarissa is responsible for the social image of the family. Outwardly, Mrs Dalloway is a sociable woman who loves the lively city. For her, “walking in London [...] is better than walking in the country” (5). Clarissa is “the perfect hostess” (6), owing to her passion for throwing parties and her social skills, “her only gift was knowing people almost by instinct” (7). She needs to keep up appearances so “she did things not simply, not for themselves; but to make people think this or that” (9). It is her superficiality that distinguishes Clarissa from her daughter Elizabeth since the teenage girl is not interested in such things (9).

Although some people, like her friend Sally Seton, think she is “at heart a snob” (161), Mrs Dalloway has got a rich inner world. Clarissa is a sentimental woman who “had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown” (9). Despite her lack of higher education, she shows interest in reading; especially during her youth, when she read Huxley and Tindall (66) or Shakespeare, to whom she usually alludes. Mrs Dalloway struggles with her thoughts about time and death, considering that she “felt very young, at the same time unspeakably aged” (7) and “always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day” (7).

Remembering her youth at Bourton with Peter Walsh and Sally Seton makes her nostalgic but at the same time, alive. Clarissa often thinks about Peter's proposal and Sally's kiss. She refused Peter in order to marry Richard Dalloway and still thinks "she had been right [...] not to marry him" (6). Sally made her feel things she could have never imagined, "the strange thing, on looking back, was the purity, the integrity, of her feeling for Sally. It was not like one's feeling for a man" (29), being a reflection of the relationship between Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West (Bradshaw 36). Nevertheless, there was an event which scarred her for ever: the death of her sister Sylvia, which "was enough to turn one bitter" (Woolf 66). In spite of the tragedy, she later "thought there were no Gods; no one was to blame" (66) and "evolved this atheist's religion of doing good for the sake of goodness" (66). Although Clarissa seems not to regret her choices, she usually considers how different her life would be "if she could have had her life over again" (9).

2.2. Septimus Warren Smith: "The outcast poet"

Septimus Warren Smith is "about thirty" (12) and served in the First World War (1914-1918), entailing a deterioration of his mental health. Thus, he suffers from shell shock, "a neurotic disorder caused by the stress involved in war" ("Combat fatigue"), as a result of the atrocities he experienced during the war. Septimus is married to Lucrezia Warren Smith, an Italian woman who tries to find a solution for his condition, taking him to the best psychiatrists in London. His intentions to commit suicide are evident from the beginning of the day, taking into account he says to his wife: "I will kill myself" (13).

Septimus is an emotional man. When he was "a mere boy" (71), he left his home since "he could see no future for a poet in Stroud" (72). In London, Septimus met Miss Isabel Pole, who lectured him on Shakespeare. He fell in love with her, pointing out she

“lit in him such a fire as burns only once in a lifetime” (72). After the outbreak of the Great War, he volunteered and “went to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare’s plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square” (73), emphasising his passionate nature. However, during the warfare, his friend and officer, Evans “was killed, just before the Armistice, in Italy” (73); significantly, despite their close friendship, Septimus was “far from showing any emotion” (73) since he was unable to express himself after his experience in the war.

After the war, Septimus was a different man: “for now that it was all over [...] he could not feel” (74). He changed from being an optimistic man to being a pessimist, stating that “one cannot bring children into a world like this” (76), showing his disillusionment with humanity. As a result of his shell-shocked condition, Septimus has several hallucinations with Evans: he sees him at the park “behind the railings” (21), “behind the tree” (59), being unable to look at his dead friend. Moreover, he listens to the birds singing in Greek (21), an episode also lived by Virginia Woolf (Kermode 8). Thus, Septimus loses his capacity to connect with the world, to communicate properly, being trapped in his own thoughts: he has gone “from life to death” (82).

Human nature, which he thinks is disgusting and condemns him to death (82), is shown through the figures of Dr Holmes and Dr Bradshaw, who are Septimus’s doctors. For Septimus, they are the oppressive society who believe “excitement was the worst thing for him” (119) and want to control him against his will: “What right has Bradshaw to say ‘must’ to me?” (125). In the end, Septimus challenges Bradshaw’s recommendations and throws himself out of the window. Although death is not what he wants, “Life was good. The sun hot” (127), he sees suicide as the only possible solution for him to keep his soul away from the abhorrent human nature.

2.3. Septimus Warren Smith as Clarissa Dalloway's Alter Ego

As mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, Virginia Woolf's first plan was the death of Clarissa Dalloway. However, she later introduced Septimus Warren Smith, with the intention of being Clarissa's double; thence, he is the one who commits suicide. Thus, *Mrs Dalloway* has to be understood as "the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side" (Woolf 207), where Clarissa embodies sanity while Septimus is the 'insane' character, as stated before. Although Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith do not know each other, they share an important bond: "Septimus's mind is locked into what happened during the eighteenth year of the twentieth century no less inextricably than Clarissa's is detained by what happened in the eighteenth year of her life" (Bradshaw 21). On the one hand, he witnessed the death of his friend Evans, in 1918, while they were fighting in the First World War, being unable to feel again since then. In contrast, Clarissa's summer at Bourton when she was eighteen was the turning point of her life, owing to what she experienced: Sally Seton's kiss.

At first, they seem to be opposites due to their social status: Septimus belongs to the working-class, taking into account he worked at "Sibley and Arrowsmiths, auctioneers, valuers, land and estate agents" (73) before the war. In contrast, Clarissa is part of the upper-class, embodying the society detested by Septimus. Nonetheless, as the novel progresses and the reader goes deeper into their thoughts, more similarities between them are found, and these two opposites become doubles. First of all, in terms of their physical appearance, both Clarissa and Septimus are compared to birds: "Septimus is 'beak-nosed' (12) and reminds Lucrezia of 'a young hawk (124), while Clarissa's face is 'beaked like a bird's' (9); according to Scrope Purvis she has 'a touch of the bird about her, of the jay (3)'" (Bradshaw 38).

However, more significantly, the doubleness of both characters has to be analysed in the light of Clarissa's fears and Septimus's ending. She fears death, which makes her believe there is life after one dies: "since our apparitions are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us might survive, attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places after death" (Woolf 129-130). On the other hand, Septimus does not want to die since "Life was good" (127), but to kill himself is the only solution for preventing his soul to be controlled by society. Thus, according to Wyatt, "Septimus becomes Clarissa's alter ego in death" (444), being his death the 'rebirth' of Clarissa (442).

Clarissa is told at her party that Septimus has committed suicide. At first, she is annoyed: "What business had the Bradshaws to talk of death at her party?" (Woolf 156), being clearly related to the fact that death scares her. Nonetheless, she ends up being happy about the tragic event: "But what an extraordinary night! She felt somehow very like him – the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living" (158), emphasising her feeling of both freedom and 'rebirth' after realising the meaning of Septimus's suicide. For Mrs Dalloway, "Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death" (156); hence, Clarissa understands the suicide of Septimus as a reflection of her own emotions, becoming aware of Septimus's loneliness, his fear and his opposition to be controlled by society (Wyatt 449).

Their passion for Shakespeare also plays an important role in connecting them. As the novel progresses, Clarissa repeats more than once "Fear no more" (Woolf 8, 25, 34, 158) while Septimus says it once (118). This sentence belongs to *Cymbeline* and "unites the ideas of life and death" (Wyatt 442) since the play is full of "reverberations of this

death and resurrection pattern” (442). ‘Fear no more’ can be understood as “the disappearance of Clarissa’s fear, both of life and of death” (451), being Clarissa’s final repetition of the sentence the most significant one, considering that it is “both a farewell to Septimus and an affirmation of his continued existence” (450). Thus, the doubleness between both characters remains clear in *Mrs Dalloway* since “Clarissa allows herself to think about Septimus’ death with full imaginative sympathy, understanding his feelings and situation instinctively with some part of her self that scarcely functions in the public world she normally inhabits” (Zwerdling 80). In the next point of the analysis, I will focus on Michael Cunningham’s *The Hours*, describing Clarissa Vaughan and Richard in order to understand their relation.

3. *THE HOURS* (1998)

3.1. Clarissa Vaughan: “An ordinary woman”

Clarissa Vaughan, who is a fifty-two-year-old ordinary woman, lives in New York City with her girlfriend, Sally, and her daughter, Julia. Her friend and former lover, Richard Brown, calls her ‘Mrs Dalloway’ as a way to compare her to Clarissa Dalloway: they share their first name, Clarissa, and both women are “destined to charm, to prosper” (Cunningham 11). She does not only love New York City and “its endless life” (14), but also “the world for being rude and indestructible” (14). On the day the novel takes place, Clarissa is going to throw a party for Richard (16), being obsessed with the need for perfection of the event. Clarissa and Sally have been together for eighteen years and they “never fight” (135). They are described as the perfect couple: “This love of theirs, with its reassuring domesticity and its easy silences, its permanence” (183), expressing their affection every day. However, their relationship has become a monotonous one, losing the passion of the beginning. In contrast, Clarissa and Julia, who is eighteen and has been raised “in a house of women” (157), do not get along well since Vaughan thinks her daughter hates her “for depriving her of a father” (157). She does not like Julia’s friend, Mary Krull, because of “her intellectual and moral intensity” (23), thinking she is a bad influence on her daughter.

Clarissa is seen as frivolous, caring too much about meaningless things (156), but also as being able to read people’s minds (130). Nevertheless, her inner world differs from that superficiality, being worried about aging, death and “the end of hope” (91). She believes in the afterlife: the soul surviving the death of the body (12); and is amazed by the idea of immortality. Moreover, Clarissa feels irrelevant, realising “the world’s ability to get along without her” (94). Thus, she often feels like leaving her life in New York and going back to being the old Clarissa: the one “still full of hope, still capable of

anything’’ (92). As a consequence of her thoughts, she tries just ‘‘to hold the moment’’ (94) and to live it. The summer in Wellfleet when she was eighteen still remains in her memory. At that moment, Clarissa ‘‘could do what she liked’’ (11), being a free girl. She still remembers her kissing Richard and wonders whether ‘‘they might have had a life together’’ (67), feeling nostalgia for it.

3.2. Richard Brown: ‘‘A dying man’’

Richard Brown is a gay poet who suffers from AIDS. On the day the action takes place, he is going to receive the Carrouthers Prize and his friend Clarissa is throwing a party in his honour. At the end of the novel, it is found that he is the son of Laura Brown, whose story is also told in *The Hours* interwoven with the narratives of Virginia Woolf and Clarissa Vaughan. Therefore, Richard is the bond between Laura and Clarissa. His childhood was traumatic since his mother abandoned him at a very early age. As a result of this trauma, Richard has written about Laura: she has been ‘‘the ghost and goddess’’ (221), ‘‘worshipped and despised’’ (221) in his literary work. During his youth, he was ‘‘a firm-featured, hard-eyed, not-quite-beautiful dark-haired boy with an impossibly long and graceful, very pale neck’’ (51). Despite his sexuality, Richard and Clarissa had an affair, being a turning point in his life, considering that he seems to be still in love with her. Unlike Clarissa’s personality, Richard is not interested in superficial issues such as famous people because he ‘‘cannot imagine a life more interesting or worthwhile than those being lived by his acquaintances and himself’’ (60).

Before having AIDS, he was ‘‘an anguished, prophetic voice in American letters’’ (11), a ‘‘fearless, ceaseless talker’’ (19). Nevertheless, the disease has entailed the deterioration of both his physical and mental health, signifying his decline as a public person. He is always at his flat ‘‘in his absurd flannel robe’’ (57), sitting in his chair to

which Clarissa refers as the one “of someone who has let things slide so far” (58). Richard thinks he receives the prize “for having AIDS and going nuts and being brave about it” (63) rather than for his literary legacy. Nowadays, “Richard cannot separate the past, present and future, nor distinguish temporal or physical space in language” (Young 46-47). Thus, it is impossible for him to differentiate between reality and imagination: he is not only unable to remember simple things such as whether he has had breakfast or has already attended the prize-giving ceremony, but also has hallucinations which cause him to listen to “very beautiful and quite terrible” voices in Greek (Cunningham 59). Richard is aware of the fact that the illness is killing him, and soon he is going to be “no more than a breathing body, incapable of coherent thought and expression” (Young 47); hence, he is not able to face the passing of time, and consequently, the worsening of his psychological condition. Since “he only has *the hours*” (47; my emphasis), Richard decides to commit suicide by throwing himself out of the window.

3.3. Clarissa Vaughan and Richard Brown: “Trusted friends”

Clarissa Vaughan and Richard Brown met while studying at Columbia University (Cunningham 95), their friendship lasting since those years; hence, they represent the type of *alter ego* coined by Cicero, that is, the one of “truest friends” (91). They have always been for each other whenever they have needed help, as currently happens with Clarissa looking after Richard due to his disease. Nevertheless, Clarissa and Richard are opposites: while she is afraid of people’s opinion, he does not give importance to superficial issues. On the one hand, Clarissa is an idealistic woman who “has always been prone to romance” (12); she loves the world that surrounds her and enjoys simple things. On the

other hand, Richard looks beyond superficiality, trying to find a different meaning in common things.

In spite of their homosexuality, Clarissa and Richard had a summer affair in 1965 (96), when they were eighteen and nineteen, respectively (11, 51), signifying a turning point not only in their relationship, but also in their lives. They had an open relationship in accordance with their liberal mindset, that is, there were no boundaries, and consequently, they could be with whoever they wanted. Suddenly, Clarissa put an end to the affair, arguing she wanted to be free whereas Richard “wanted too much” (52). Nevertheless, Clarissa and Richard have not forgotten their kiss in Wellfleet: after “more than thirty years” (98), they still remember that moment and wonder if they could have had a future together, being “husband and wife, soul mates” (68), their feeling for each other remaining. According to Clarissa, that kiss “*was* happiness” (98): she has lived more experiences like that throughout her life, but they cannot be compared to that particular moment with Richard; Clarissa remembers the kiss as magical and unique due to its “singular perfection” (98), thinking “it seemed, at that time, so clearly to promise more” (98). In contrast, regarding Richard’s loss of the notion of time, that moment “it’s still happening” (66). Thus, he seems to be still in love with Clarissa on account of the fact that he has written about her in his latest novel (16), and in his last words, Richard claims two people could not have been happier than they have been (200).

Richard’s suicide is the climax in Clarissa’s day, considering she witnesses the moment when he throws himself out of the window. After the initial shock, her first reaction is going downstairs where Richard’s body lies; there, she regrets not having given him a last kiss. Once Clarissa arrives to her apartment, she meets Richard’s mother, Laura Brown, and they have a conversation about him. Then, Clarissa realises “it’s time for the day to be over” (225), wondering if the next day will be not only the end of

Richard's presence in the world, but also the end of his literary legacy (225). Moreover, it is important to highlight Clarissa's thought about life and death:

We live our lives, do whatever we do, and then we sleep – it's as simple and ordinary as that. A few jump out of windows or drown themselves or take pills; more die by accident; and most of us, the vast majority, are slowly devoured by some disease or, if we're very fortunate, by time itself. There's just this for consolation: an hour here or there when our lives seem, against all odds and expectation, to burst open and give us everything we've ever imagined, though everyone but children (and perhaps even they) knows these hours will inevitably be followed by others, far darker and more difficult. Still, we cherish the city, the morning; we hope, more than anything, for more. (225)

Thus, nothing is more important than enjoying the moment because we do not know when our lives will end. Although death is always amidst us, the here and now is all we have guaranteed; hence, we face the days, and consequently, their hours, asking always for more life.

The Hours achieves its aim of connecting different characters through death. Clarissa Vaughan is Richard Brown's alter ego because of their lasting friendship: they have always been there for each other. It is in Richard's death that Clarissa realises the importance of living the moment. Thus, it is impossible not to relate the novel and its characters to Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs Dalloway*. The final point of this analysis is going to deal with the social differences found between both novels in order to explain how Clarissa Vaughan is the contemporary alter ego of Clarissa Dalloway as well as Richard Brown is a modern double of Septimus Warren Smith.

4. *MRS DALLOWAY* (1925) AND *THE HOURS* (1998)

The connection between Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* (1998) is unquestionable. First of all, Woolf's masterpiece itself connects the lives of the three main female characters in Cunningham's work: Virginia Woolf herself is writing *Mrs Dalloway*, Laura Brown is reading the novel some years later, and Clarissa Vaughan is nicknamed 'Mrs Dalloway' by her dearest friend. However, these novels share a deeper bond amidst their characters: Clarissa Vaughan is Clarissa Dalloway's alter ego as well as Richard Brown can be considered Septimus Warren Smith's double; hence "Cunningham Americanizes and popularizes Woolf's text" (Schiff 369). Although the action of both *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Hours* takes place in the twentieth century, the social context of each story is totally different. Thus, it is necessary to analyse both novels in the light of the time in which each one is set in, with the purpose of understanding their similarities and differences.

Mrs Dalloway's action takes place in 1923, consequently, it belongs to the interwar period (1918-1939). Five years after the ending of the First World War (1914-1918), "The War was over [...]; thank Heaven – over" (Woolf 4), its consequences are still present in England since many young men lost their lives during the warfare, "Everyone has friends who were killed in the War" (56), as is the case with the son of Lady Bexborough (4) or Septimus's friend, Evans (56). Furthermore, the psychological trauma of the surviving veterans is irrefutable, as seen in the figure of Septimus Warren Smith, suffering from shell shock owing to his experience in the war. In "Mrs Dalloway and the Social System", Alex Zwerdling states that in the novel, "Woolf examines the governing class of England at a particular moment in history" (70), which is embodied by people such as the Dalloways, according to Peter Walsh (Woolf 65). Thus, English society is still very conservative at that time, and "worships Proportion, by which it really means

atrophy of the heart, repression of instinct and emotion’’ (Zwerdling 72); hence, mental issues were not considered acceptable since they were a symbol of weakness, and Septimus Warren Smith is “‘a threat to governing-class values not only because he insists on remembering the War when everyone else is trying to forget it, but because his feverish intensity of feeling is an implicit criticism of the ideal of stoic impassivity’’ (75). Moreover, homosexuality was also controversial: it was illegal until 1967 in the United Kingdom (‘Sexual Offences Act 1967’), although “‘female homosexuality was never explicitly targeted by any legislation’’ (Dryden); Clarissa chooses to restrain her feelings for Sally in order to follow the rules established by society.

In contrast, the story of Clarissa Vaughan and Richard Brown in *The Hours* is set in the 1990s in New York, which is a cosmopolitan city: “‘Here is the ordinary world, a movie being shot, a Puerto Rican boy cranking open the awning of a restaurant with a silver pole’’ (Cunningham 24); hence, the world is more open-minded, and consequently, homosexuality is not a taboo topic at the moment. Although same-sex marriage was not legalised until 2011 in the state of New York (‘Same-sex marriage’), Clarissa Vaughan lives with her girlfriend Sally as if they were married. Unlike the society of *Mrs Dalloway*, people in the 1990s are not facing the consequences of a war, but the effects of an epidemic which has not got a cure: “‘AIDS has replaced World War I as the catastrophic event that has taken the lives of so many young men’’ (Schiff 367), being “‘the leading cause of death for all Americans ages 25-44 years old’’ (‘1990s HIV/AIDS Timeline’). Thus, AIDS is a main theme in *The Hours* since Richard Brown has the disease.

4.1. Clarissa Dalloway's up-to-date Alter Ego: Clarissa Vaughan

Clarissa Vaughan is the contemporary double of Clarissa Dalloway: while Mrs Dalloway lives in London in 1923, Clarissa Vaughan is in the New York City of the nineties. First of all, they share their first name, Clarissa, and both women are fifty-two years old. However, the most important bond between them has to do with Clarissa Vaughan's nickname: her best friend Richard Brown decided to call her 'Mrs Dalloway', considering that "she was destined to charm, to prosper" (Cunningham 11). On the day *Mrs Dalloway* and the section entitled 'Mrs. Dalloway' in *The Hours* are set in, Clarissa Dalloway and Clarissa Vaughan are going to throw a party; hence, the beginning of each story is the same: "Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself" (Woolf 3) whereas "There are still flowers to buy" (Cunningham 9) in *The Hours*. It is important to highlight that as Schiff argues, Cunningham's Mrs Dalloway is allowed "to live a domestic and sexual life largely unavailable to Clarissa Dalloway in 1920s London" (368); hence, Clarissa Vaughan is free to live with her girlfriend Sally whereas Woolf's Mrs Dalloway has to obey the values established by society, thereby she is married to Richard Dalloway.

In terms of their personality, Clarissa Dalloway and Clarissa Vaughan are identical: Mrs Dalloway loves "life; London" (Woolf 4) whereas Vaughan admires New York and "its endless life" (Cunningham 14). Moreover, their social skills are impressive since Clarissa Dalloway is capable of "knowing people almost by instinct" (Woolf 7) and Clarissa Vaughan "seems, at times, to have read your thoughts" (Cunningham 130). Although they often obsess over the superficial, and consequently, are seen as frivolous women, "Cunningham's modern Mrs. Dalloway commands a higher degree of awareness, anticipates a possible critique of her way of life and her preoccupation with her party and meets these objections through her self-awareness and self-criticism"

(Spengler 60); hence, Clarissa Vaughan knows that people may not understand her choices, but remains faithful to herself. However, neither Dalloway's daughter nor Vaughan's daughter shares her mother's worry about meaningless things: while Elizabeth is not interested in gloves (Woolf 9), Julia is not interested in wearing dresses (Cunningham 21).

In contrast, their inner world is far from that superficiality, showing their concern for ageing, death and immortality. Thus, Clarissa Dalloway and Clarissa Vaughan do not only share their opinion about the afterlife, but also the same feeling of being invisible: Clarissa Dalloway feels "invisible; unseen; unknown" (Woolf 9) whereas Vaughan "trivial, endlessly trivial" (Cunningham 94). Furthermore, Woolf's Mrs Dalloway is constantly thinking about her past and the choices she made then: "she had been right [...] not to marry him" (Woolf 6), referring to her refusal to Peter Walsh's proposal; likewise, Clarissa Vaughan's "interior life is [...] plagued by similar regrets and uncertainties about decision she has made" (Schiff 368), also wondering whether things could have been different: she and Richard "might have been husband and wife" (Cunningham 67-68). Both Woolf's and Cunningham's Mrs Dalloway lived an event the summer when they were eighteen that they would remember all their lives. On the one hand, in *Mrs Dalloway*, Clarissa and Sally Seton kissed at Bourton, being described by Clarissa as "the most exquisite moment of her whole life" (Woolf 30). On the other hand, in *The Hours*, Clarissa and Richard Brown kissed in Wellfleet, evoking "the feeling that 'anything could happen' [...] of not knowing the future" (Haffey 154) to her, and consequently, "to fully occupy the present" (154).

Both Clarissa Dalloway and Clarissa Vaughan share a similar end of the day too. Mrs Dalloway is told at her party that Septimus Warren Smith, whom she personally does not know, has committed suicide; likewise, Clarissa Vaughan witnesses the suicide of her

best friend Richard Brown. These deaths mean a learning for both women: while Woolf's Mrs Dalloway feels herself released after understanding the meaning of Septimus's suicide, Richard's death helps Clarissa Vaughan to realise the importance of the present.

4.2. “The poet will die, the visionary”: Septimus Warren Smith and Richard Brown

Although Richard Brown is seen as “an amalgam of Septimus Smith, Sally Seton, Richard Dalloway, and Peter Walsh” (Schiff 367), his connection with Woolf's insane character is the most obvious of all since both men do not only share the same passion for poetry, but also their fatal ending. In the past, Septimus was a visionary young man who went to London to become a poet (Woolf 72) whereas Richard was “an anguished, prophetic voice in American letters” (Cunningham 11); nonetheless, a twist of fate changed their lives. Thus, they illustrate first-hand the effects of the main tragedies occurred in their eras, that is, the First World War in *Mrs Dalloway* and the AIDS epidemic in *The Hours*: while Septimus is a shell-shocked war veteran, the mortal disease has entailed the deterioration of Richard's physical and mental health.

As a result of their mental illness, both men have similar hallucinations: they listen to voices in Greek, Septimus at the park (Woolf 21) whereas Richard at home (Cunningham 59). Moreover, their respective societies see Septimus and Richard as outcasts: on the one hand, the conservative society of *Mrs Dalloway* does not allow Septimus's weakness; on the other hand, people in the 1990s are afraid of the AIDS since it is incurable. However, the worst consequence of their madness is the loss of their most valued ability: to communicate properly, “Communication is health; communication is happiness” (Woolf 79), to distinguish between reality and imagination. Since they are aware of their frail condition, they commit suicide by throwing themselves out of the window. Neither Septimus nor Richard fears death, but the world and its injustices: while

Woolf's character hates the oppressive society in which he lives, Cunningham's fears to be "no more than a breathing body, incapable of coherent thought and expression" (Young 47). Thus, *The Hours* is an echo of *Mrs Dalloway*. It is London in 1923 and it is 1990s New York City, and consequently, the world has completely changed; nonetheless, Clarissa Vaughan still shares Clarissa Dalloway's worries. Moreover, Richard Brown contemplates killing himself as the only possible solution for his insanity as Septimus Warren Smith thought almost eighty years ago before.

5. CONCLUSION

Virginia Woolf was one of the pioneers of British Modernism, and consequently, a key figure in 20th century English literature. Thus, she was ahead of her time, writing about controversial topics such as feminism, homosexuality or mental illnesses. Despite her tragic death in 1941, her literary legacy still remains significant eighty years later, being a source of inspiration for other authors as is the case of the American writer Michael Cunningham, whose novel *The Hours* is an updated version of Woolf's masterpiece *Mrs Dalloway*.

In this dissertation, I have analysed *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *The Hours* (1998) in the light of the figure of the *double* or *alter ego*, focusing on the main female and male character of each novel. First of all, I have tackled *Mrs Dalloway* and its main characters: Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith. It is 1923 in London; Clarissa is an upper-class woman while Septimus is scarred for life after the horrors he witnessed during the First World War. Thanks to her experimental writing technique, Virginia Woolf connects the lives of both characters even though they do not know each other personally: Clarissa and Septimus's repetition of Shakespeare's "Fear no more" and their opinion about the conservative society in which they live help the reader to establish the bond between them. Thus, Septimus is Clarissa's alter ego since his suicide evokes a feeling of freedom in her. Secondly, I have focused on *The Hours* and its main characters: Clarissa Vaughan and Richard Brown. It is 1990s New York City; Clarissa and Richard have been best friends since their youth, being their friendship the reason why they are considered alter egos.

To conclude the analysis, I have compared *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Hours* since Cunningham's work is an echo of Woolf's novel. Although the stories of each novel take place in a completely different period of the 20th century, both societies are facing the

consequences of two disasters: the First World War and AIDS. Clarissa Vaughan is the modern double of Clarissa Dalloway considering that both women do not only share their social skills, but also the same fears. Richard Brown is the contemporary alter ego of Septimus Warren Smith as both men are two sick poets who kill themselves on account of it being the only possible solution for their frail mental condition. Thus, the meaning of *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Hours* is found in the death of Septimus and Richard since it is necessary for Clarissa Dalloway and Clarissa Vaughan to realise how valuable life is, to understand that we only have the here and now.

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